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# The Journey of a Navy Neuropsychologist

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**By Lt. Ana Soper, Ph.D, neuropsychologist, Marine Corps Recruit Depot, Parris Island**

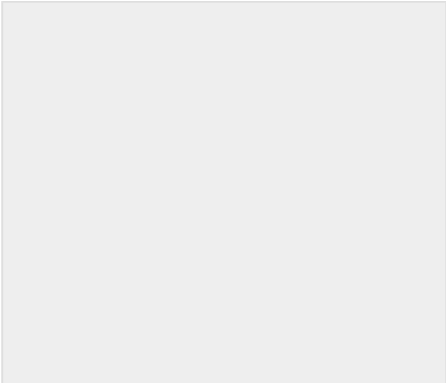


Although the trail from civilian to Navy officer was not the trail I had planned to take, the experience of being new to the Navy has given me some of the most broadening and poignant moments of my life (e.g., hearing Old Glory read aloud for the first time).

In case you haven't heard, neuropsychologists can be a bit on the "thorough" side. As a Veterans Affairs staff neuropsychologist, I had a 30-year future career mapped out in detail, until I heard a life-changing talk given by a Navy neuropsychologist featuring the practice of neuropsychology in the Navy (in theater), and who spoke highly of the Navy's people. Come to find out that in the Navy you really do get to run with

some amazing people – literally.

My first duty station is at [Naval Hospital Beaufort, S.C.](#), serving [Marine Corps Recruit Depot \(MCRD\) Parris Island](#), the USMC's East Coast recruit command. As an early career neuropsychologist, I am engaged in opportunities I would only have dreamt of receiving later in my career had I remained in a civilian health care system. First, neuropsychology services have not previously been provided here and I have had the opportunity to develop a neuropsychology service at our hospital and to get a new cognitive rehabilitation component of a stress management program up and running. The Department of Defense (DoD) has well promoted provider awareness of concussion and traumatic brain injury (TBI), in my observation. My command was extremely supportive and well-informed about what I do as a neuropsychologist.



I work within a hospital that serves Marines and Sailors who have served in combat, an extraordinary opportunity for a neuropsychologist who specializes in TBI assessment. However, given the additional patient population of retirees and dependents, it is also possible to see the full complement of neuropsychology cases that we would see in an adult general practice.

Another way of looking at this experience is

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Lt. Soper’s first salute. (Courtesy photo)

that you will never feel so valued as when your boots hit the ground at a small command, *and* when people find out you are a neuropsychologist.

A few parting words applicable to direct accession neuropsychologists:

1) As a civilian neuropsychologist, you may be accustomed to being embedded within a large

team of rehabilitation professionals as I was. In rehabilitation-speak, Navy Medicine is now your interdisciplinary team!

Early outreach of those within my specialty community (e.g., regional colleagues at the [Camp Lejeune Marine and Sailor Concussion Recovery Center](#)) was critical. If you are new to the Navy, you will be part of a strong professional network. Our specialty leader greatly facilitates this. You will also certainly receive my warm welcome and offer of assistance!

2) My formative clinical experiences were through the [VA health care system](#), which helped with readiness to serve our population. I recommend the high-caliber VA fellowship grads as a pipeline for our direct accessions. As we move toward inter-agency “jointness,” it will be interesting for us to continue to develop our collaborative spirit with VA.

3) Routine discussion of ethical practice in the Navy has provided excellent preparation for those of us who are studying for board certification in neuropsychology (ABPP-CN).

4) As a direct accession, you enter the Navy as a junior officer, which can be an unfamiliar role for a neuropsychologist or rehabilitation psychologist. This is a personal journey that you go on as a direct accession, but I can tell you that when I focus my thoughts on “Ship, Shipmate, Self” there is no greater trail to travel.

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Lt. Soper as team leader of the Navy Training Vessel Buttercup. (Courtesy photo)

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*\*Editor's note: Direct accession is a term for when a person is given an officer appointment directly into the service. The Navy commissions civilian, licensed psychologists who are already autonomous professionals before joining the Navy, through a direct accession program. More information about this program is available at: <http://www.wrnmcc.capmed.mil/ResearchEducation/GME/SitePages/Psychology/Navy%20Psychology.aspx>.*

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